

FRIEND OF THE COURT ASSOCIATION OF MICHIGAN
POSITION STATEMENT

RE: HB 6698, 6699, 6701, 6702, 6703
CHILD SUPPORT GUIDELINES COMMISSION

The Association can not support the proposed changes at this time.

We are mindful that the Michigan Supreme Court urged, some three years ago, transferring the responsibility for maintenance of the Michigan Child Support Guidelines from the Judiciary. We are also appreciative of the efforts put forth by the sponsors of the bills.

However, during the intervening time significant developments have occurred such that making any changes at this point in time could have significant adverse affects for those who must administer the Guidelines. Chiefly, action by the federal government has cast a severe financial cloud over the entire Michigan Child Support Program by prohibiting the use, effective October 1, 2007, of federal child support performance incentive funds as local match. Since earlier this year when this action occurred, the Friend of the Court Association has been working with the State Court Administrative Office and other program partners to develop suggestions to reduce program expenses and to stabilize program revenues.

One of the items identified to better use existing program resources is to simplify the Michigan Child Support Guidelines and related administrative requirements. Compared to other states, Michigan's Guidelines are complex and overly burdensome to administer. Work has already begun to identify ways to make the Guidelines easier to understand by the parties, lawyers and program staff; to reduce the administrative burdens of applying the Guidelines for those utilizing them (chiefly Friend of the Court Offices conducting required support reviews and support investigations) and to deal with the economic results of the formula.

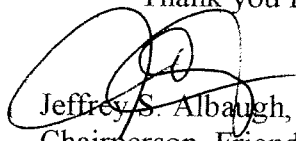
The Friend of the Court Association strongly believes that changing the responsibility for maintenance and review of the Guidelines at this point will adversely affect achieving simplification in 2007 and could also adversely affect compliance with the next federally required review which we understand must be completed by December 31, 2007.

We are also concerned that any new review system will need to be properly staffed and funded in order for the Commission to carry out its work. With the financial challenges facing the state and the child support program, we believe now is not the time to make this change.

We strongly urge that the current process continue through 2007 and that if a change is still found to be necessary it occur after the current simplification initiative and impending federally required review are completed.

The Association will continue to work closely with the legislature, the State Court Administrative Office and interested parties to assure that the Michigan Child Support Guidelines are fair, simple to understand and are not administratively burdensome.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeffrey S. Albaugh", is written over the printed name.

Jeffrey S. Albaugh, Calhoun County Friend of the Court
Chairperson, Friend of the Court Association Funding and Mandates Committee

December 5, 2006